

The Red Wolf's Future: A Cautious Optimism

Red wolves are special. They are the only large predators to date that have been declared extinct in the wild, bred in captivity, and successfully reintroduced to a portion of their former range. Bringing the red wolf back from the brink of extinction has been a pioneering venture, and thanks to the efforts of the people who worked diligently for years to ensure that red wolves would once again live in the wild, there is now hope and cautious optimism. The future of the red wolf is not, however, secure. Although red wolf numbers continue to rise slowly, the reintroduction effort faces challenges. First, the options for red wolf release sites are limited. Large tracts of wild lands are scarce in the eastern United States, and human density is high. Secondly, more than half of the population of red wolves live in captivity. Because of their limited numbers in the wild, eliminating hybridization with coyotes is a priority for wildlife biologists.

"The wolf, I believe, is our teacher. But the wolf is also in competition with the people for the land, for the wilderness. Maybe that is why there is resentment. But I wonder, what do people want in the future? What is their vision? Will the world consist only of vast cities and factory farms? Will there only be pockets of wild animals preserved in parks and zoos? And if that happens, what will we become?"

Teresa tsimmo Martino: The Wolf The Woman The Wilderness

Why Should Red Wolves Be Protected ?

"In the beginning, the people say, the Dog was put on the mountain and the Wolf beside the fire. When the winter came the Dog could not stand the cold, so he came down to the settlement and drove the Wolf from the fire. The Wolf ran to the mountains, where it suited him so well that he prospered and increased."

James Mooney: Myths of the Cherokee

The red wolf was once the top predator in its habitat. Writings dating back several centuries refer to wolves similar to the red wolf in what is now the southeastern United States. Many researchers believe that red wolves have shared the North American continent with humans for thousands of years. Native Americans revered the wolf. The red wolf was known as "Wa'ya" to the Cherokee; the "Ani-Wa'ya" or Wolf People were the principal clan.

Summit predators play a positive role in maintaining healthy ecosystems. They help to ensure the natural hierarchy of animal species by keeping the numbers of prey populations in balance. Rather than eliminating large predators, humans must make a concerted effort to preserve them as necessary elements in regulating the food chain.

One of the most important reasons for protecting red wolves is the awareness that every species has intrinsic worth. The red wolf is a unique animal that contributes to the overall biodiversity of the ecosystem. But it has an aesthetic value as well as a practical one. Red wolves are beautiful. If they vanish from existence, we humans as a species are diminished. For all these reasons, we must protect and preserve this critically endangered animal.